

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: GOI MINI-CABINET SHUFFLE

1. MRS. GANDHI DID SOME LOW-KEY RESHUFFLING OF HER CABINET
DEC 22. THE KEY MOVE WAS TO BRING GUJARAT CONGRESS PRESIDENT
HITENDRA DESAI INTO THE CABINET AS MINISTER FOR WORKS AND
HOUSING, THEREBY REMOVING HIM FROM THE LOCAL GUJARAT SCENE AND
PRESUMABLY PAVING THE WAY FOR HIS GUJARAT CONGRESS RIVAL,
M.S. SOLANKI, TO BE NAMED TO SET UP A GOVT IN THAT STATE IN
THE NEAR FUTURE. DESAI HAD DECLINED SEVERAL TIMES TO ACCEPT A
DELHI CABINET POST, PREFERRING TO CONTINUE TO CONTEST FOR THE
GUJARAT CHIEF MINISTERSHIP. WHILE HE REMAINED ON THE LOCAL
GUJARAT SCENE, MRS. GANDHI WAS UNWILLING TO AUTHORIZE FORMATION
OF A CONGRESS STATE GOVT FOR FEAR RENEWED FACTIONAL
INFIGHTING WOULD SWIFTLY AGAIN UNDERMINE THE STABILITY OF THE
GOVT. DESAI HAS OBVIOUSLY BEEN PERSUADED HE HAS NO OTHER OPTIONS
THAN TO COME TO THE CENTER.

2. MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMERCE, D.P. CHATTOPADHYAYA,
WAS ELEVATED TO BE A FULL CABINET MINISTER, A MOVE WHICH BOTH
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ACKNOWLEDGES HIS EFFECTIVENESS IN SUBSTANTIALLY EXPANDING INDIA'S
FOREIGN TRADE IN THE LAST TWO YEARS, AND OFFERS A "SOP" TO
THE BENGALI LOBBY WHICH HAS BEEN AGGRIEVED OVER CENTER HANDLING
OF WEST BENGAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS IN RECENT WEEKS.
HE IS THE FIRST BENGALI FULL MINISTER OF CAINET SINCE 1972.
THE PROMOTION OF CHATTOPADHYAYA, NO FRIEND OF WEST BENGAL CHIEF

MINISTER S.S. RAY, IS ALSO ANOTHER QUIET CLINK OF THE CHIPS AGAINST RAY IN THE STRUGGLE FOR INFLUENCE WITH THE CENTER BY CONTENDING BENGALI FACTIONS.

3. OTHER CHANGES ARE MINOR: THE PROLONGED DECLINE (OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS) FROM INFLUENCE OF MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO RAJ BAHADUR ENDS WITH HIS RESIGNATION FROM THE CABINET AND THE DESIGNATION OF K. RAGHURAMAIAH AS FULL MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION. RAJ BAHADUR WILL REPORTEDLY BE GIVEN A GOVERNORSHIP SOMEWHERE. RAGHURAMAIAH HAD BEEN ACTING AS "IN CHARGE" OF THE MINISTRY (AS WELL AS HIS OWN MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS) FOR SOME TIME FOLLOWING THE DOWNGRADING OF RAJ BAHADUR, THE PREVIOUS MINISTER, TO HIS "WITHOUT PORTFOLIO" STATUS. ANOTHER MINISTER ON HIS WAY DOWN IS P.C. SETHI, FORMERLY HANDLING CHEMICALS AND PHARMACEUTICALS, AND NOW DOWNGRADED FORMALLY TO "WITHOUT PORTFOLIO". SETHI HAS SUFFERED A SERIES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABERRATIONS AND HOSPITALIZATIONS SINCE LAST SUMMER. K.D. MALAVIYA, WHO HAS BEEN "IN CHARGE" OF SETHI'S FORMER MINISTRY FOR SEVERAL MONTHS CONTINUES IN THIS STATUS.

4. V.N.P. SINGH MOVES UP FROM DEPUTY COMMERCE MINISTER TO MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMERCE; J.B. PATNAIK MAKES THE SAME JUMP FROM DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENSE TO MINISTER OF STATE IN THAT MINISTRY. SURENDRA PAL SINGH MOVES FROM MINISTER OF STATE FOR TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION TO THE SAME JOB IN THE RAILWAYS MINISTRY. VIRBHADRA SINGH, ONE OF THE TW CONGRESS DEPUTY WHIPS IN THE LOK SABHA, BECOMES A NEW DEPUTY MINISTER FOR CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM. BUTA SINGH SHIFTS FROM DEPUTY MINISTER IN RAILWAYS TO THE SAME POSITION IN COMMERCE. THE DEPUTY MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS, JAGANNATH PAHADIA AND THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF LABOR, BAL GOVIND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VERMA, SIMPLY SWITCH PORTFOLIOS WITH ONE ANOTHER.

5. WE ARE AT THIS POINT UNABLE TO PLACE ANY SPECIFIC SIGNIFICANCE ON THE SHIFTS DESCRIBED IN PRA 4 ABOVE OTHER THAN TO NOTE THAT V.N.P. SINGH AND J.B. PATNAIK BOTH APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN POLITICALLY ACTIVE ON BEHALF OF SANJAY GANDHI IN RECENT MONTHS.
SCHNEIDER

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